Middle Bronze Age Drayton, West Sussex

A Deverel-Rimbury cemetery assemblage

by
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The Middle Bronze Age — a Deverel-Rimbury cemetery assemblage

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The greater part of the prehistoric assemblage belongs to the Deverel-Rimbury (*hereafter* DR) pottery tradition, dated, on the basis of radiocarbon dated associations from elsewhere, to between *c.* 1700 and 1150 cal BC (the Middle Bronze Age), most Sussex radiocarbon dates, including those from Drayton's Area 1, falling towards the end of this period (Needham 1996, 132–5; Hamilton 2003, 83; Chadwick 2006, 29). In all, it comprises *c.* 60 kilograms of pottery. Most of this comes from 26 truncated, probable cinerary urns (Appendix 1), belonging to a single large or several small cemeteries extending across the site *and beyond*, with a smaller domestic-looking fraction (comprising a wider range of pottery types) coming from the same general area but a more extended range of features.

With one or two exceptions, the DR forms and fabrics present are familiar ones, wholly characteristic of the tradition locally (Seager Thomas 2008, 29–31), and need not detain us at length, but the assemblage is of interest on a number of other counts.

First amongst these are the configuration and condition of the urns, which provide internal evidence that most are indeed cinerary urns, and, related to this, the composition of the different feature-assemblages, both funerary and domestic-looking, and the similarities to and differences between these and other similarly interpreted regional assemblages. These support the forgoing interpretation and highlight a local depositional idiosyncrasy. Also of interest is the nature of the fills of several of the urns and *their* possible interpretation. Finally, we will address the depositional, typological and fabric differences between pottery groups in the context both of the radiocarbon dates from Area 1, and some local and non-local analogues, in the hope that this will begin the process of untangling individual expression in pottery making locally from developments that occurred in the DR tradition over time.

Deverel-Rimbury at Drayton

Following Ann Woodward (Ellison 1978; 1980a), Sussex DR pottery is conventionally divided into a continuum of 'heavy-duty' wares, 'everyday' wares, and 'fine' wares. 'Heavy-duty' wares comprise mostly thick-bodied, coarsely flint-tempered bucket urns, usually with cordons; 'everyday' wares, slightly less thick-bodied and smaller, coarsely or medium flint-tempered straight or convex sided vessels, again often with cordons; and fine wares, medium or fine flint-tempered globular jars, characteristically decorated with bands of short incised/ burnished lines.

Occasionally these DR vessels have finger smeared finishes, but more usually they have lumpy, roughly wiped surfaces, whilst burnishing (a characteristic to which we will return under DR's successor tradition), is rare.

Drayton's cinerary urns, with just a few imprecisely defined exceptions, are 'heavy-duty' wares in medium to coarse and coarsely flint-tempered fabrics (Appendix 2). Four pots are new to the Sussex koine. One has an unusually low cordon (MBA pot 10) (Fig. 1). This perhaps indicates that it formerly had *two* cordons. Another appears to have had a raised bar — badly damaged during machining — on the inside of the pot, on its base (MBA pot 26 — not illustrated). And two (from different groups — MBA pots 10 & 18a) have fingertip impressions on their base angles (Figs 1 & 3). Also worth highlighting are individual 'heavy-duty' wares amongst the cinerary urns and in the domestic-looking assemblage that are finger smeared and/ or furrowed (MBA pot 15), flint and grog-tempered (MBA pot 17), decorated with a curved, applied cordon (MBA pot 22) (Fig. 3), and with comb-impressions (MBA pot 34) (Fig. 4), traits which, although not unique in the county, are relatively uncommon locally and will feature in the discussion below.

The domestic-looking assemblage by contrast comprises a more even mixture of 'heavy-duty' and 'everyday' wares (represented by approximately 25% medium, as opposed to medium to coarse and coarsely flint-tempered fabrics and a handful of small and/ or relatively thin-bodied jars — e.g. MBA pots 28–31),[1] as well a sherd from a possible 'fine' ware jar (MBA pot 27) (Fig. 4). (For some sample fabric descriptions see Appendix 2 — more detailed descriptions can be found in Raymond 2003a, appendix 1).

The interpretation of the urns

Given the absence of cremated bone from the upright urns, and its presence beneath the inverted urns, it is tempting to suggest the existence on site of two different rites, one involving the inurnment of cremated bone, one not. In fact, however, both most probably contained bone. This is indicated by a marked difference in the interior weathering of upright and inverted vessels on site (Appendix 1), which shows their contents to have been subject to very different weathering environments — effectively, the inverted urns protected the cremated remains, while the upright urns did not. This view is consistent with evidence from nearby Claypit Lane, Westhampnett, and with that from better known cemeteries outside the county, such as Vinces Farm,

[1] MBA pot 31, which is not illustrated, comprises the whole base and lower body of a small, thin bodied, straight-sided jar in a coarse flint tempered fabric.

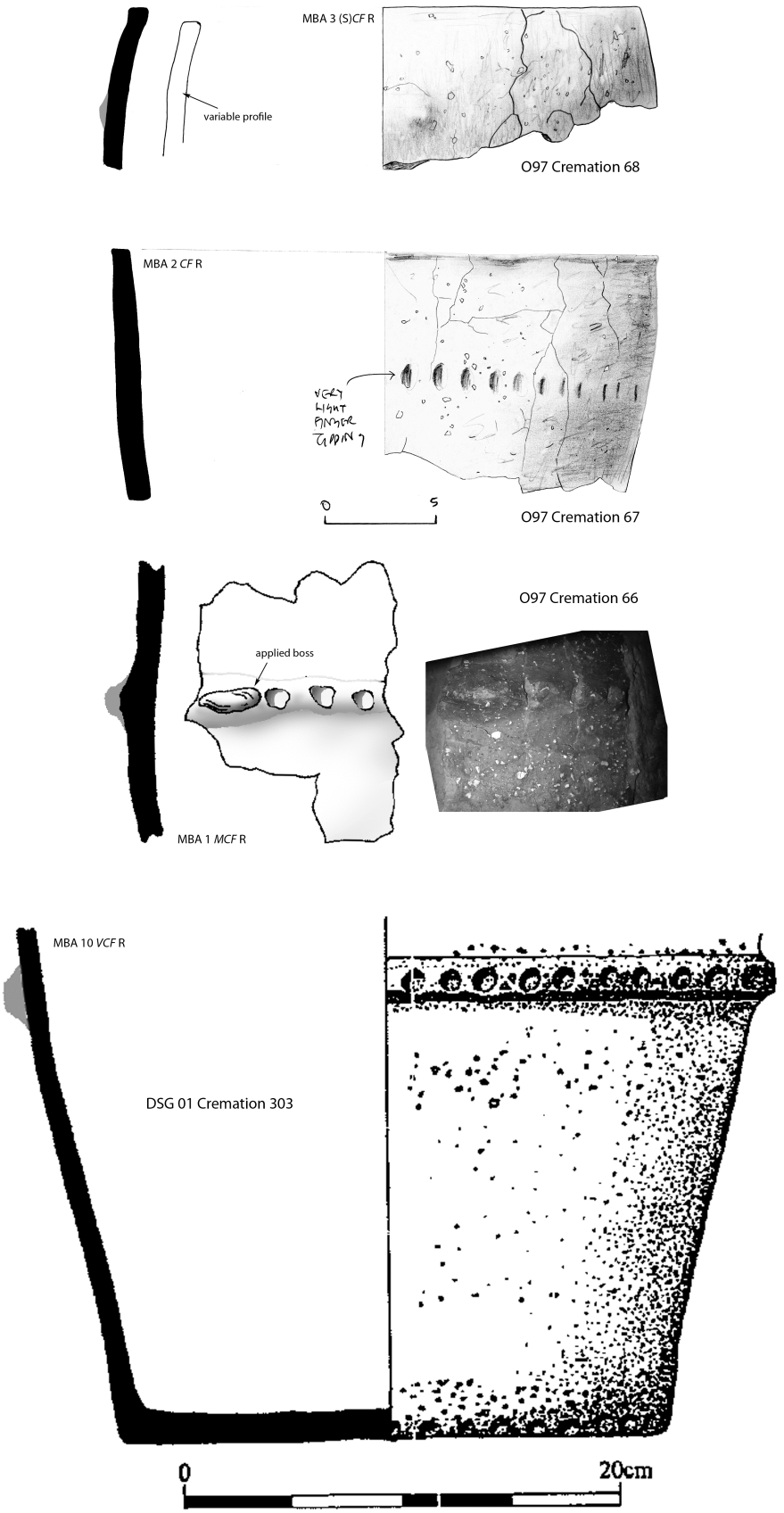
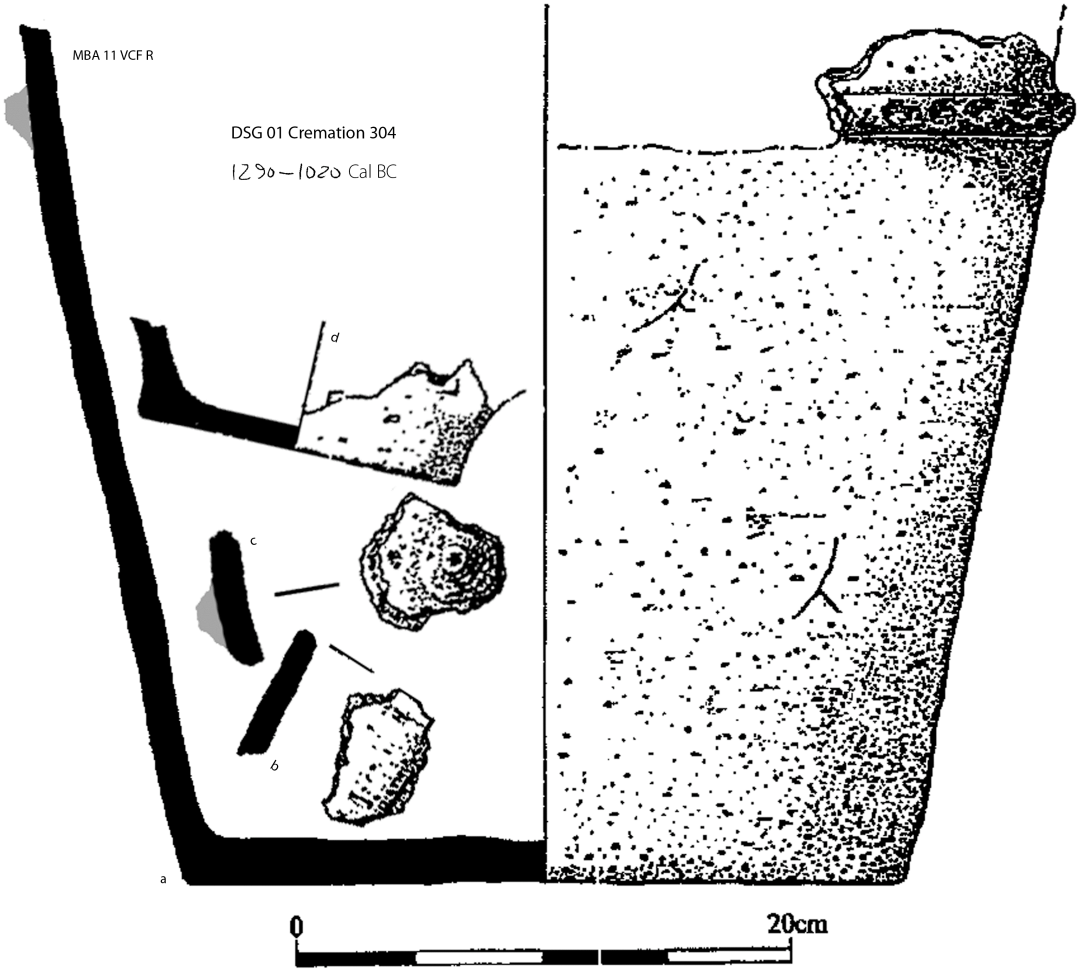


Figure 1. Deverel-Rimbury urns from cremations 66, 67, 68 and 303



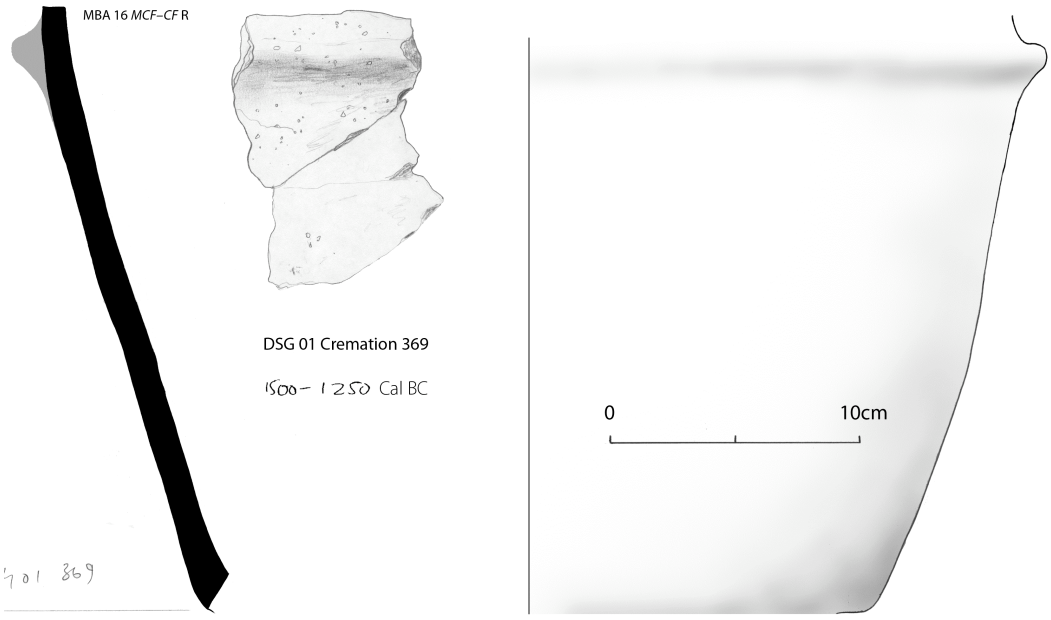


Figure 2. Deverel-Rimbury urns from cremations 304 and 369

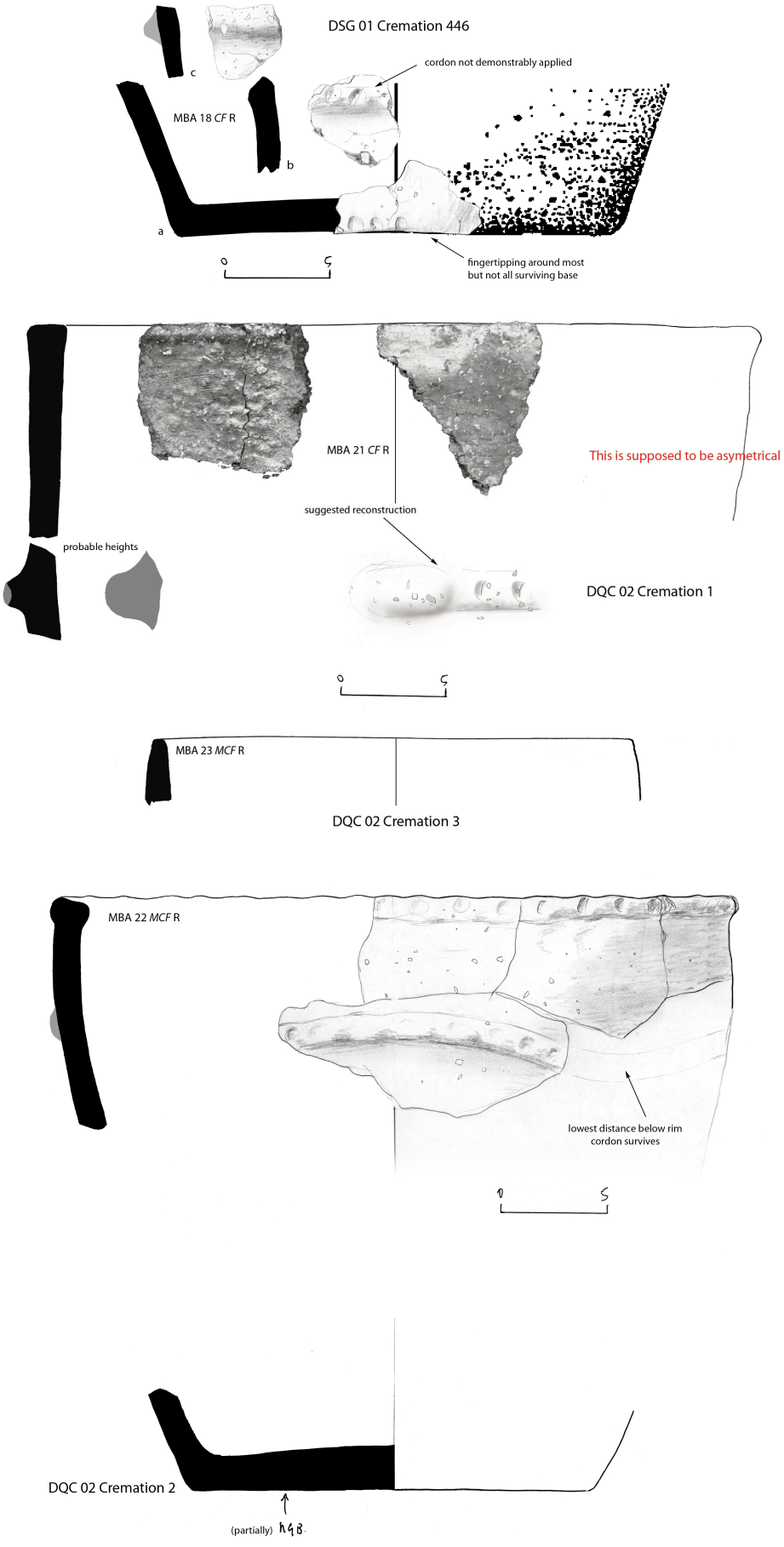


Figure 3. Deverel-Rimbury urns from cremations 1, 2, 3 and 446

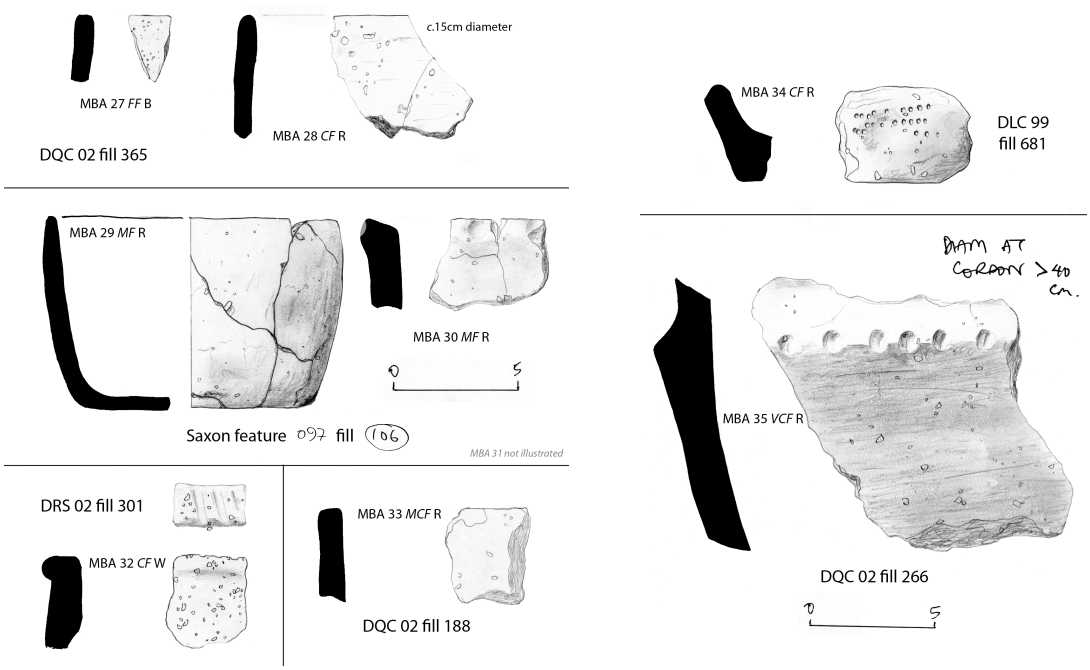


Figure 4. Deverel-Rimbury pottery

Ardleigh, and Chitts Hill, where both upright and inverted DR urns yielded cremated bone (Chadwick 2006, 11–16; Crummy 1977, 7; Erith & Longworth 1960, 180).

Owing to its sparsity and very fragmented condition, it is not possible to suggest to what use(s) exactly the domestic-looking assemblage was put, but its different associations, and insofar as it can be reconstructed, its composition, strongly suggest a different use or range of uses to that of the urns.

Assemblage composition — regional and local difference

It was hoped that a comparison of the urns horizontally would cast light on their chronology and perhaps the groups responsible for their deposition. Unfortunately, however, there are no interpretable spatial trends. Inverted and upright urns, urns with applied fingertip impressed cordons and simple fingertip impressed cordons, medium to coarse flint-tempered and very coarse flint-tempered, relatively large and relatively small pots all occur side by side; while similar features and fabrics, rather than clustering, occurred in widely separated locations (Appendix 1). That is to say: no distinguishable chronological or cultural *groups* are represented. Rather than developing over time from a single focus, these are discrete cemeteries, perhaps representing individual/ family groups (cf. Ellison 1980b). What does stand out however is the

difference between the pottery used for cinerary urns on site and that comprising both the rest of the assemblage, and cinerary urns from elsewhere in the county. Owing to the fluid nature of DR typology, it is impossible to quantify exactly the relative proportions of Woodward's 'heavy-duty' and 'everyday' wares. Nonetheless the difference between the two Drayton groups and, in particular, the Drayton urns and other Sussex cemetery groups is marked. For example, a DR cemetery at Angmering, yielded a single fine ware sherd (Seager Thomas in prep.), a possible funerary monument at Selsey, three empty but whole 'everyday' wares (Kenny 1989, figs 5.1–3), and Itford Hill's cemetery barrow (in East Sussex) inverted whole 'everyday' and 'fine' ware pots (Ellison 1972; Seager Thomas 2008, figs 5–8). The former is perhaps to be expected (cf. Woodward 1995, 199) since the cinerary urn's role is to contain a cremation, whereas domestic pottery has a wide range of uses. But the latter comes as something of a surprise. Given the presence of DR 'everyday' and 'fine' wares on the Plain, this clearly is not a reflection of DR locally; rather, it would suggest the selection of one type of pot over another. For burial, Drayton favoured large pots over small ones. In terms of selection *per se*, this is consistent with the wider record, which, to the west, shows different proportions of different classes of vessels on cemetery and domestic sites (*ibid*., fig. 17.1). But in terms of the actual proportions, Drayton is distinct.

Marking the urns?

In a recent article *Potboilers Reheated*, the present writer drew attention to a number of DR urns from the Plain, which were found full of burnt stone (Seager Thomas 2010b). In the absence of evidence for cremated bone, these were interpreted as deliberate ritual deposits, a view that is fatally undermined by the Drayton urns, many of which contained large quantities of burnt stone (one more than nine kilograms of — apparently — unburnt stone stratified between smaller assemblages of burnt pottery and burnt flint), but are nonetheless interpreted as cinerary urns. How then *are* we to interpret these curious finds? On the evidence currently available, the answer is we are not — at least with certainty. Three observations are worth making of Drayton, however, which might inform their interpretation in the future. Firstly, large assemblages of stone occurred only in upright pots. Whilst this could reflect a particular type of structured deposition, it suggests the possibility that the pot merely provided a catchment, and that the presence of stone in them was not deliberate, but a secondary product of something which existed or took place on the ground above. Secondly, large assemblages of stones occurred in pots that were heavily weathered internally, slightly weathered internally, and not weathered at all internally (we do not have to appeal to potboilers again, whose agitation in a pot, might abrade the

pot's interior surfaces). Lastly, all but one of the groups of upright pots incorporated at least one that was filled with burnt stone. That is to say, at Drayton, whatever it was that existed or took place on the ground above was integral to all these groups. The writer's current view is that deposits of light coloured burnt stones were used as markers.

The 'affinities' of the Deverel-Rimbury pottery

Every excavation of a Middle Bronze Age site throws up a new DR pottery form, and Drayton is no exception. In the southeast this slow build up of knowledge led, firstly, to the inference of exclusive regional pottery groups based on Wessex, Ardleigh in East Anglia, Sussex and the Thames Valley, and then, as forms that apparently belonged to one group — usually Ardleigh — turned up in another, the implicit identification of some kind of relationship between these. With each new find however the tradition as we know it has become more homogenized, and for the most part these views are no longer sustainable. It now appears that the tradition in the southeast, with the exception of 'fine' wares, for which a regional differentiation still holds good, was pan-regional. Nonetheless the Ardleigh connection keeps turning up in the Sussex literature (e.g. Every & Mepham 2006, 29) and it is worth taking this opportunity to try and dispose of it once and for all.

Drayton yielded seven pots with 'Ardleigh' traits, MBA pots 10 and 18a, with fingertip impressions around the base (Figs 1 & 3), MBA pot 17, which is partially grog-tempered, MBA pot 22, whose curving cordon recalls the so-called horseshoe-shaped handle (Fig. 3), MBA pot 26, with the raised bar on its base, and MBA pot 34, which is comb-impressed (Fig. 4)(cf. Ardleigh, Brightlingsea and Chitts Hill, in Essex: Brown 1995, tabs 12.2 & 3; Clarke & Lavender 2008, figs 22.2 & 23.12; Crummy 1977, 8–9; Couchman 1975, figs 4.21 & 5.A1; Erith & Longworth 1960, figs 2 & 4.a).

The fact is however there is nothing especially East Anglian about any of these traits. Essex has yielded only three more DR pots with fingertip impressions around the base than Sussex (Brown 1995, table 12.3; Crummy 1977, fig. 8), and the trait is known from Kent (Raymond 2003b, 29). Double cordons are known from Surrey (Betchworth — Needham 1987, fig. 5.8) and Kent (Great Mongeham: Stebbing 1937, fig. 2). DR-like fabrics incorporating grog are present in at least three other Sussex assemblages (see below), including Black Patch, Alciston (Seager Thomas 2008, pl. 1.7), and in West Kent (at Gravesend, on the Isle of Sheppey and at several unpublished sites: Barclay 1995, figs 9.7 & 10.9; Raymond 2003b, figs 1.15, 7 & 11), as well as large areas of East Anglia and the East Midlands (e.g. Allen *et al.* 1987, fig. 19; Brown 1995, tab 12.2). True DR horseshoe-shaped handles are widely distributed in the southeast, coming from three Sussex sites (Seager

Thomas 2008, 31), Surrey (e.g. Ashford Hospital: Cowie 2008, fig. 8) and Hampshire (Kimpton: Dacre & Ellison 1981, fig. 19), and raised bars on the bases of pots occur in the West Country during this period, where they are associated with Trevisker Ware (e.g. at the type site: ApSimon & Greenfield 1972, fig. 17). Finally, comb-impressions on DR pottery are now known from five Sussex sites, *more* than in Essex (Brown 1995, tab. 12.3), as well as sites in Surrey (Beddington: Masefield 2001, fig. 6) and Hampshire (Oliver's Battery, Winchester: King 1989, fig. 4)!

Dating

No doubt some individual pots amongst this and other DR assemblages are the result of individual expression amongst potters (MBA pot 32 — if indeed it is DR at all?), but given, on the one hand, the wide distribution of some rare traits, and on the other, the longevity of DR, it is tempting to attribute at least some of them to the development of the tradition over time. That this was possible at Drayton is confirmed by radiocarbon dates associated with MBA pots 11 and 16, which have widely different foci, two extending the chronological range of the tradition locally into the 11th century BC, and by the presence both of pots that are unequivocally DR, and which although still DR, possess traits associated with transitional and *post* DR (PDR) traditions elsewhere, notably the heavily gritted base (MBA pot 9), the fingertip impressed shoulder (pot 35 and another not illustrated), neither of which — perhaps significantly — was associated with the wider cemetery, grog-tempering (which on two unpublished Sussex sites — Beddingham Roman Villa and Yapton Road, Climping — was associated with possible transitional DR/ PDR assemblages) (MBA pot 17), and finger smeared — as opposed to smoothed or wiped — surface finishes (MBA pot 15).

A second strand of evidence lies in the associations of the site's 'Ardleigh' and other idiosyncratic traits *elsewhere*. In Sussex comb-impressed decoration, the horseshoe handle, and the plain applied-cordon, which at Drayton was associated with the earlier of the radiocarbon dates (MBA pot 16), are associated with earlier (Bronze Age) Biconical Urn traditions (at Crowlink and Charmandean, for instance: Hamilton 2001, fig 11; Seager Thomas 2008, figs 4a & b), whereas neither comb-impressed decoration, nor the horseshoe handle, occur on PDR pottery. Conversely, the foregoing PDR traits are rarely associated with local Early Bronze Age traditions. (The obvious exception here is grog-tempering, which is widely characteristic of Early Bronze Age pottery, but during that period it was only occasionally mixed with flint — Ellison 1980a, 33). Owing to the distribution of pottery on site, at Drayton, these two strands of evidence cannot be tied together, and neither *proves* the other, but they nonetheless provide strong

circumstantial evidence for something more than a single period DR/ Middle Bronze Age assemblage on site.

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Appendix 1. Cinerary urns

Site code	Context	Catalogue nos	Group number	Approximate diameter (cm)	Body sherd thickness (mm)	Weight (gms)	Typological features	Fabric	Exterior finish	Interior weathering	position	Cremated remains	Stone
O97	66	1	CG4	22 cordon	9	7700 (including earthen matrix)	Applied, fingertip impressed cordon with ovoid boss	MCF	smeared	unknown	unknown	yes	-
O97	67	2	CG4	24 rim	9–12	926	fingertip impressed cordon	CF	wiped	no	inverted	yes	-
O97	68	3	CG4	22–4 rim	7–10	558	none	SCF	smeared	no	inverted	yes	-
DLC99	103	4	S	unknown	unknown	408	unknown	MCF	unknown	weathered overall	unknown	yes	-
DLC99	465	5	S	18–20 base	12	834	none	VCF	unknown	yes	upright	unknown	-
DLC99	671	6	S	unknown	10	551	none	CF	smeared	(?) yes	unknown	unknown	yes
DSG01	214	7 (13)	S	26–36 base	13–16	4718	none	SCF	unknown	weathered overall	upright	no	yes
DSG01	237	8 (11)	S	unknown	10–11	275	none	MCF/CF	unknown	weathered overall	upright	no	-
DSG01	276	9 (12)	S	24–30 base	10–11	6525	Fine, heavily-gritted base	VCF	unknown	weathered overall	upright	no	-
DSG01	303	10 (1)	CG1	26 base >30 cordon	7–9	3626	low applied fingertip impressed cordon; rough fingertip impressions immediately above base	VCF	faintly wiped	yes	upright	no	265g FCF
DSG01	304	11 a–c (2)	CG1	26 base	10–13	7473	applied, fingertip impressed cordon	VCF	wiped; horizontal smear towards base	slight	upright	no	9000g blackened stone beneath 114g FCF
		11 d	CG1	13 base	11	unknown	none	unknown	unknown	unknown	inside 11	no	-
DSG01	313	12 (9)	CG3	unknown	unknown	87	none	MCF	unknown	unknown	upright	no	56g FCF
DSG01	317	13 (8)	CG3	26 base	13	2495	none	VCF	smoothed	yes	upright	no	624g FCF
DSG01	318	14 (10)	CG3	unknown	8–9	635	none	SCF	wiped	yes	upright	no	1400g FCF
DSG01	368	15 (4)	CG1	unknown	9–10	1438	none	MCF	vertical finger smear	yes	upright	no	246g FCF
DSG01	369	16 (3)	CG1	25–8 base	9–12	4269	plain applied cordon	MCF/CF	wiped	yes	upright	no	5000g FCF
DSG01	370	17 (5)	CG2	unknown	8–10	1097	none	CFG	rough	yes	upright	no	349g FCF
DSG01	446	18 a–c (14)	CG2	22–4 base	9–10	2075	plain applied *and/ or* (?) raised fingertip impressed cordon (both found in pot); fingertip impressions around base	CF	smoothed — faintly wiped	yes	upright	no	yes

Site code	Context	Catalogue nos	Group number	Approximate diameter (cm)	Body sherd thickness (mm)	Weight (gms)	Typological features	Fabric	Exterior finish	Interior weathering	position	Cremated remains	Stone
DSG01	465	19 (6)	CG2	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	unknown	upright	no	6g FCF
DSG01	546	20 (7)	CG2	30–40 base	10–13	3015	none	VCF	unknown	no	upright	no	2300g FCF
DQC02	26 C1	21	CG7	39 rim	12–15	4360	applied, fingertip impressed cordon; boss	CF	smeared	no	inverted	yes	yes
DQC02	28 C2	22	CG7	24–30 rim	11–13	2926	applied, wavy/ curved fingertip impressed cordon; expanded, externally fingertip impressed rim; partially heavily-gritted base	MCF	smoothed	rim: no base: yes	inverted	yes	yes
DQC02	C3	23	CG7	23 rim	10–13	154	none	MCF	smoothed	yes	inverted	yes	?yes
DQC05	238 P4	24	6	26 base	9	981	none	SCF	wiped	slight	upright	no	-
DQC05	P6	25	6	unknown	10–13	2090	none	VCF	flattened; otherwise unknown	weathered overall	upright	no	-
DQC05	P7	26	S	unknown	10–12	1110	Raised rib across base interior	CF	unknown	slight	upright	no	-

Appendix 2. Sample fabric descriptions

Code	Summary	Description	Finish
FF	Fine flint	Sandy matrix; 10% medium to coarse sand-sized flint.	Oxidized and unoxidized (red brown exterior and dark grey interior) — burnished (MBA pot 27).
MF	Medium flint	(?) Fine sandy matrix; 20% coarse sand to granule-sized burnt flint; ragged fracture.	Oxidized and unoxidized (buff exterior and buff to dark grey interior) — lumpy, roughly finished (MBA pot 29).
MCF	Medium to coarse flint	Fine sandy matrix; *c.* 15–20% coarse sand to very small pebble-sized burnt flint (dominated by smaller fraction); ragged fracture.	Oxidized (orangey buff) — vertically finger smeared (MBA pot 15); oxidized to unoxidized (dark grey to red brown) — smoothed (MBA pot 22).
CF	Coarse flint	Fine sandy matrix; *c.* 15% coarse sand to very small pebble-sized (up to 4mm) burnt flint (dominated by pebble-size fraction); ragged fracture.	Oxidized to unoxidized (red brown to dark grey) — roughly smoothed (MBA pot 18a).
CFG	Coarse flint with grog	Fine sandy matrix; *c.* 7–10% coarse sand to very small pebble-sized (up to 4mm) burnt flint; rare (<1%) burnt flint up to 7mm; sparse to common coarse sand to very small pebble-sized (up to 4mm) grog; ragged fracture.	Oxidized and unoxidized (buff interior and dark grey brown exterior) — roughly finished; probably vertically finger smeared (MBA pot 17).
VCF	Very coarse flint	Fine sandy matrix; *c.* 15–20% coarse sand to very small pebble-sized (up to 7mm) burnt flint (dominated by pebble-size fraction); ragged fracture.	Oxidized to unoxidized (dark grey to red brown and orange, the later post firing) — very lumpy but apparently roughly smoothed (MBA pot 13).
VCF	Very coarse flint	Sandy matrix; *c.* 20% coarse sand to very small pebble-sized (up to 9mm) burnt flint (dominated by pebble-size fraction); ragged fracture.	Oxidized to unoxidized (dark grey to red brown) — roughly smoothed with flint level with/ impressed into surface (MBA pot 25).

Drayton MBA pot 16

Drayton MBA pot 22

Drayton MBA pot 29

Drayton MBA pot 35